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Four contributors to Rattling the Cages: Oral Histories of North American Political Prisoners discuss their experiences with imprisonment, education behind bars, organizing with fellow prisoners, and the ongoing importance of international solidarity with captured revolutionaries.

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RATTLING THE CAGES

ORAL HISTORIES OF NORTH AMERICAN POLITICAL PRISONERS

"Continuing the Struggle Inside & Out"

ERIC KING | RAY LUC LEVASSEUR | ASHANTI ALSTON

Originally hosted as a live conversation by Firestorm Books,
recording available on Firestorm's youtube channel:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=imd77Jr5IPI
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Published by AK Press, *Rattling the Cages: Oral Histories of North American Political Prisoners* is a project of abolitionists Josh Davidson and Eric King. The book is filled with the experience and wisdom of over thirty current and former North American political prisoners. It provides first-hand details of prison life and the political commitments that continue to lead prisoners into direct confrontation with state authorities and institutions.

Transcription, editing, and formatting by ev, Danielle, Josh, & Jeremy with help from Firestorm Books.

all labor volunteered

with whatever weapons at hand

Eric King is a father, poet, author, and activist. In December 2023 he was released from the supermax ADX prison after spending nearly ten years as a political prisoner for an act of protest over the police murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. He was held in solitary confinement for years and was met with violence by guards throughout his incarceration. Eric has published three zines: *Battle Tested* (2015), *Antifa in Prison* (2019), and *Pacing in My Cell* (2019). His sentencing statement is included in the book *Defiance: Anarchist Statements Before Judge and Jury* (2019). Eric now works as a paralegal for the Bread and Roses Legal Center.

Ashanti Alston is an anarchist who was in prison for 4 years for his involvement with the Black Liberation Army. Prior to his arrest Ashanti was a member of the BLA and the Black Panther Party. He has since his release played an important role on the steering committee of the National Jericho Movement to Free US Political Prisoners. Ashanti wrote the afterward to the political prisoner anthology, *Let Freedom Ring: A Collection of Documents from the Movement to Free US Political Prisoners* (2008).

Ray Luc Levasseur was a member of the United Freedom Front and the Sam Melville–Jonathan Jackson Unit who spent over twenty years in prison. The group known as the Ohio 7—Ray, Patricia Gros Levasseur, Barbara Curzi-Laaman, Carol Saucier Manning, Tom Manning, Jaan Laaman and Richard Williams—were working-class revolutionaries charged with actions against US military facilities, recruitment centers, and corporate headquarters. These actions were done in solidarity with the people of South Africa and Central America, who were bearing the brunt of US imperialism. Ray spent twenty-one months imprisoned in Tennessee State Penitentiary in Nashville and at Brushy Mountain State Penitentiary in Petros, Tennessee, between 1969 and 1971, before spending twenty years imprisoned from 1984 to 2004 for his actions with the UFF. Ray has published three zines—*Family Values*; *Letters from Exile*; and *The Trial Statements of Ray Luc Levasseur*—all of which are to be republished by Kersplebedeb and Burning Books in 2024.

Libertie Valence: Welcome to everybody. Big thanks to everybody who's joining us tonight. My name is Libertie, and I'm a member of the Firestorm Collective. Tonight we're really excited to host contributors to *Rattling the Cages: Oral Histories of North American Political Prisoners*. We'll be doing a conversation tonight on their experiences behind bars and the importance of international solidarity both then and now.

Firestorm is a 16-year-old radical bookstore owned and operated by a queer feminist collective in southern Appalachia on the land of the Cherokee People. We strive to feature books and events that reflect our interests and the needs of marginalized communities in the South, and we're continuing to do some of our events virtually, like this one, both because we know it expands the possibility of what we're able to do and also makes this space accessible to lots of folks who for a variety of reasons are still not spending a lot of time at in-person events.

Without further ado, I'm going to pass it off to Eric who's going to take it away here. Thanks so much, Eric.

Eric King: Thank you so much. Before we get into the deep questions, this week was my six month free anniversary, and I was wondering if either of you two could tell me what your memories were of your release date: what you felt, what you were wearing, what you ate, just any recollections or memories you have from the day that you were released from prison.

Ashanti Alston: I was captured in '74 and was released at the end of '85. A year before I was released, me and Safiya Bukhari had got married, so I definitely remember the release date, because Safiya picked me up. We had a trailer visit before—that one—but it was just special, this woman who I married picked me up. But the problem was New York wasn't allowing me to come back to New York, which is where Safiya lived. She took me to my lawyer's house, and my lawyer was like, until he can work that out with New York to get me back to New York, I'm going to live with him and his family. We spent that day at my lawyer's house celebrating my release with him. That's my memories of that. I don't remember what we ate. I don't remember none of that stuff. But, man, well, one of the things was that my lawyer had a sense of humor, because the Connecticut—this is Connecticut, I don't know if I said it—the bank expropriation took place in New Haven, Connecticut. My lawyer had a sense of humor, so he wanted to make sure we drove by the bank. I was like, "Okay, okay." That was his sense of humor, and I appreciated it at the time. [*Laughter all around.*]

After all that time, getting out and knowing that I left some comrades behind in prison in Connecticut… Like with Safiya, I know I'm coming out, I'm coming out hitting the ground running, getting right back to work around the political prisoner issue probably before anything else.

Eric King: Yeah, absolutely. Alright, Ray?

Ray Luc Levasseur: When I was released from Brushy Penitentiary in '71, it was a little bit different. Time, place, and conditions determine a lot. At that time, I was released on parole on a condition that I leave the state of Tennessee, so I couldn't stay in Tennessee. I was released from Brushy Mountain, right? There was nobody. I didn't know anybody in the area, so there was nobody waiting for me. I had just enough money for—a guy dropped me off at the bus station—for a ticket back to Maine. I was dressed in a prison outfit, the old brogans and everything, and I went into a KMart department store near the bus station, and I got a pair of jeans and a t-shirt, a pair of sneakers, went in the dressing room, threw all the prison clothes into the trash, changed over, got on the long bus back. The last thing I did after I got out the front door was turn around and give the place the finger. I mean, it was kind of a bittersweet moment for me. I took that long bus drive back to Maine, and an important point I want to make is—I may make this later if we get into this more—is that political prisoners, like any other prisoners, most of us return back to the class we came from, and I came from a working class family, worked at shoe factories and shit, and they didn't have a lot of resources, so when I got back, first thing I got to do on my agenda is to survive.

I'm sleeping on a couch. I got to find a job. I found a job making concrete blocks. You can imagine how thrilling that was after coming out of a steel and concrete encased prison, but you got to do what you got to do to survive, to get back on my feet, right? That's what I was doing six months later. But it was just after that, and that's a delicate time for people, when they get out after that six-month period, I got a little breathing room—and we can get into that later, how I made use of my time there politically and otherwise. Fast forward, I was at the USP Atlanta, federal penitentiary in Atlanta when I got out, and the last person I saw leaving there was Mutulu Shakur, who I had just spent four years with. Fine, fine brother. That was a

painful thing about leaving. Mutulu and the conscious brothers, they had given me a send-off the day before. But to walk out and leave Mutulu there, there was some pain involved in that. I sincerely hoped that he was going to get out a lot sooner than he did, and he did as well, but you know what happened. They didn't let him out until many years later, and he died shortly after.

There was also joy, because as soon as I got out from those thick granite walls there, Jamila, my wife, was waiting for me. We had our shotgun marriage in the penitentiary a few months earlier, and she was going to accompany me from Atlanta back to Maine. They had tried to force me to go to New York City. Most people would have grabbed on that. There was a network there I could connect to, but I needed to get back home, because my mother was elderly, she wasn't going to be around much longer. You know where it hit me? I'm really out, I'm really out, and how do I know that? Because we got to get from the joint to the airport, and the BOP gave us an escort to make sure I got to the airport, and then, when we got to the airport, the FBI comes over, and they said, "You know why," and they took me around security so I didn't get snagged up in that, then went into the secure area. They said, "You know what? There's a couple hours before your flight leaves. We're going to go with these guards here and grab a bite to eat. We'll meet you back here in an hour and a half." That's when I knew my ass was definitely out of prison when they walked away from me instead of trying to grab my ass over the many years that they did. They wanted to make sure, because of the No Fly list, that I got on that freaking plane, that's what the FBI was there for. When we got back home, I was very fortunate that Jamila is a registered nurse, and so I had something there materially to help support me, so I didn't have to sleep under a bridge when I got out, and to help me with those initial steps.

Eric King: I think I just learned that all three of us got married inside prison

Ashanti Alston: Uh huh. You too?

Eric King: That's wild. Both of you did over a decade in prison. Ray, you did two decades. During that time, how were you able to maintain or be a part of the struggle, either the struggle inside the prison or the struggle that you were a part of that landed you in prison? How were you able to continue and maintain that struggle if you were?

Ashanti Alston: Well, inside, when we were captured in New Haven, Connecticut, there was support groups that was there for us from New York. They was support groups, even ones that I had been a part of—at a certain point I'm underground—but some of those same folks, when we was in New Haven going to trial, them same defense committees was there for us during the trial. There was one local group in New Haven, which was actually a Trotskyist group that was there for us, and they were really solid, really consistent, really great, and also they was the first ones to give me a much better understanding of what it was to be a Trotskyist in the movement, because I kind of brushed it off, because Marxist-Leninist-Maoists, sometimes you don't really question, "Well why do we got this thing with the Trotskyists? Why is that?" Anyhow, they were really solid and really great supporters. Inside, those support groups, defense groups, also helped to keep you in touch with family. If the family needed help to come up to see me, they would help with that process. The letter writings—and the letter writings at that time was really, really important, because, though our minds at the time during the trial was still, "We ain't really trying to sit here for the process of this trial. We really are looking for avenues out," but you got to deal with both realities, both possibilities. You might have to do this trial and get sent, or you might find an opening and you're out of there, but they provided that link that kept us hopeful with the course of the struggle, that folks were still carrying on the struggle.

Our particular case, because we were captured in the midst of this expropriation, we had no illusions about getting acquitted. We were fortunate enough to have good lawyers who volunteered their services. Two of them, David Rosen and Ed Dolan, were also part of Erica Huggins' and Bobby Seal's legal defense team. They contacted us and said, "Hey, we're here for you if you want it. We're here to defend you." We were like, "Right on." There was another lawyer too, John Williams, who also had politics. We knew that this was going to be a political trial. During this time, our minds was still "We're at war." The process of this trial was almost like a distraction, but it was the connection with the defense committees, the New York ones, the New Haven ones, and there was not a lot of support, but it still kept us connected. We wasn't able to get out after a few attempts. Prison. We get sentenced. It was the banks, so it was federal charges and state charges. For the bank expropriation, it was a 5 to

25 year sentence, and then, because it was the shootout and two cops got hurt, it was 10 to 20 for that. Now we're in always the different prisons, and after that they kept us separated. We was never to be in the same prison anywhere again except towards the end, and in [Summers] when one of my comrades was transferred there, and for a brief period of time—I had made parole—we was there at least for several months together.

But I think what I wanted to bring up, is that, because our minds is still at war, I studied. I trained. My comrades studied.

Eric King: You say trained, you mean physically?

Ashanti Alston: From physical to just exercise, because we had the examples of stories from Huey P. Newton in prison. We had the stories of George Jackson. It was almost like if you're in the cell, and here comes the guard just making his regular rounds, we might, just to play with him, pop down on the floor, we knocking out 20 push-ups or whatever, you know. Otherwise, we're doing all the other things, because we want to stay ready. That whole "Stay Ready" mentality. It was not depressing for me, I didn't go through no depression. It was just the "Ready" mentality. But I read, like I said before. I read all the time. So, going off to prison I had already… The first stop was Oxford, Wisconsin.

Eric King: Oh, that was your federal prison?

Ashanti Alston: That was the first. No… Well, that was the first one they sent me to because I had to do the federal time first, right, and go to Federal, go to Oxford, Wisconsin, and one of my comrades comes there also, who's down in prison in Georgia now, Kamau Sadiki. It was one of the first times that me and another comrade from the BLA was in the same prison. Same mentality. We're at war. We got a brother that's training us in kung fu and everything else, and we got to do it secretly, because you can't do it in the open, the guards don't play that stuff. But then, I had put in for a transfer to Lewisburg prison, and eventually I got transferred to Lewisburg, because at least it was the closest to home. Lewisburg was one of the major maximum prisons, federal prisons.

Eric King: Serious place.

Ashanti Alston: Serious place. Me, you know, I'm a young guy, and there

was a few other guys in there, young, we're young. But there's a collective there, and what the collective does, you come into the collective of comrades from different formations, right, and you're studying, you're training. You got other folks in there, prisoners who want to be a part of that kind of revolutionary consciousness-raising stuff. It's an easy connection still at the time, because this is the mid '70s going into the late '70s. Still it's, "How can we get out of this big prison with these tall walls?" But support groups kept us connected to the movements. Like I will say over and over, it wasn't like we got letters from a lot of people, it wasn't like that. Like the National Jericho Movement and other groups will have letter writing nights and all that. We didn't get that. We wasn't getting money for commissary and all that. We was just facing this situation, doing this time, looking for openings to get out. But I learned a lot there. I read. Even all the times I was in and out of segregation, I'm like, "You can put me in seg, just give me my books." But now I'm reading, and I'm interacting with others. I'm beginning to read the radical psychologies, the feminisms. I'm beginning to read the more in-depth histories of different struggles like the Irish freedom struggles with the IRA.

Eric King: Now we're talking.

Ashanti Alston: The Philippines, the Hukbalahap rebellion, maybe even more in-depth Chinese Revolution, the Cuban Revolution, because comrades was still able to get books and things in, so there was books always floating around. So, I'm also learning in this environment. I don't give a damn that it's in prison. Sundiata Acoli would say when we used to correspond—we wasn't supposed to, but we did—he would say, "Turn that prison into a university." It's all about preparing you for getting out. That was my experience there. But the repression inside the prison got to be really bad. This particularly fascist warden came in at a certain point, he was clamping down on a lot of stuff. I worked industry with others at the time, and some things happen in industry, like industry caught on fire a few times. "Hey, what I know… By chance," that's what I say. Who did they come after? They they came after me, a few other comrades, jailhouse lawyers. Next thing I know, they swooping us up, we on the bus on our way to Marion, Illinois.

Eric King: You were at Old Marion?

Ashanti Alston: At Marion, who's one of the first people we see—who's in

general population, but they walking us to segregation—it's Rafael [Cancel] Miranda of the Puerto Rican independentistas. He's letting us know that they already know that we're on our way there. They had already got the word through the grapevine. Herman Bell was there. Other comrades who may not be known like Joe Monaco and Bobby Holmes. There was other political prisoners there, because Marion took the place of Alcatraz. The experience of Marion was like this was supposed to be the most escape-proof prison at the time, and one of the things for me, it was so electronic, everything was. You want to open up the gate or something, the cell, they got to push a button, and it opens up. All that stuff was new for me. The surveillance… The guards took a lot of notes on individuals. I never made it to general population.

Eric King: We'll get to repression here soon. We'll be talking about that.

Ashanti Alston: Okay. So, there, those political prisoners and politicized prisoners had one of the most fantastic libraries. Again, I'm learning. I'm increasing my understandings of struggle and the anti-authoritarian aspects, the anarchist aspects, and moving closer in that direction. But I still had connection through the defense committees to the movements, some of the movements that was going on, but those numbers were dwindling, because they were getting hit with a lot of repression. Safiya and them and others decided to go underground because there was these grand jury searches, trying to get them on different charges of supporting other actions to help free BLA folks or political prisoners. Like I said, wasn't a lot of letters, wasn't all that stuff, but we know, we're soldiers, this is what we gonna do. Next thing from there, some of us was like, the word was, "Don't accept general population." So, some of us decide to stay in seg to force them to transfer us, and they ended up transferring some of us to Lompoc, California. Who was amongst that group? Leonard Peltier. Bobby Holmes. Joe Monaco. Curley Raul Estramera, he's BLA, Puerto Rican BLA. And others.

Here we are. Now we're all Lompoc, but Lompoc was just in the process of transferring from medium security to maximum, and it was kind of a modernist place, and it had fences, but they hadn't had all the constantino wire up yet. Here we are, all doing all this time. We like, "Man, we got to hit this fence before they get all this constantino wire up." In the process, we are meeting other folks, supporters from the outside, and especially, at this time, some revolutionary groups in California, one was called the

Wellspring Collective or Tribal Thumb, which was a very anti-authoritarian group, and they would come up to visit. More and more, I am learning different ways that people struggle and are trying to carry it on in that California area, because a lot of them politicized prisoners who was with George [Jackson] or out of them circles were coming out also in getting involved with grassroots organizing. I feel like that's always my prison experience. I gotta learn, I gotta be ready, and I gotta make sure that I'm interacting with folks who are still carrying us on or figuring out ways to keep the momentum. Many of us was on that same page. So, then Connecticut, and eventually I get parole, parole to the Connecticut state prison, and I finished the second half of my sentence there, and eventually get out.

Eric King: Perfect. Thank you. Also, you mentioned Tribal Thumb. Someone I look up to, Bill Dunne, was a member of Tribal Thumb, so it's very interesting…

Ashanti Alston: Listen, just to say about him, Bill Dunne, I think—I believe—that part of the reason he got captured, recaptured, was because we needed him to help us. There's a special part of me that's always there for him, because he made a sacrifice.

Eric King: For the people listening, if you'd like to write Bill Dunne, he is currently at the medical facility in FCI Butner, if anyone wants to write.

Ray, would you like to touch on that same topic about how you maintain struggle both or either inside or outside of those movements?

Ray Luc Levasseur: Well, first of all, Bill Dunne. Yeah, it'd be very nice if people could write to him at Butner. I just got a letter from him a few weeks ago. I first met him back in… He's struggling with health issues and everything, but he's still got the same strong spirit and good sense of humor. He always has. He needs a little support.

Eric King: Lots of support.

Ray Luc Levasseur: Briefly, as I mentioned, you know, we're talking one struggle here: two parts of it, inside and outside. I've always found it interesting that the political prisoners on the inside always gravitate to each other, no matter which movement or which organizations they come

from, while the support organizations on the street seem to do a lot more squabbling with each other and can't seem to deal with all the obstacles they need to form a more united front around political prisoners. Briefly, my first experience in Tennessee at Tennessee pen in Brushy Mountain, it was my first prison experience, and I didn't have… I had been politically active before, when I went to Southern Student Organizing Committee, but hadn't been in the movement that long. So, my support network wasn't that strong. Initially, yes, I was able to get books and correspond with people, and this is very helpful, like Ashanti pointed out, political education inside.

Right from the get go, we had a food strike over conditions at the county jail in Tennessee. What was particularly interesting and pertinent about that was you had white and black prisoners, and you had to overcome that racial barrier to get everybody together on the same page and go and strike over these conditions. We managed to do that.

Eric King: In the state prison it was still racially split like that?

Ray Luc Levasseur: Well it was, but I'm not there yet, I'm in the county jail.

Eric King: Oh, sorry. Right.

Ray Luc Levasseur: I presented the demands. We threw all our food back out, made a mess, wouldn't eat. The goon squad comes up, the whole deal. I got the demands ready. Top of the list: have to improve the food and the medical care, which was basically non-existent. They dragged me out the next day to the courthouse and got me a forced transfer to state penitentiary in Nashville. Every joint I've been in has been either max or supermax. Right away, I got a jacket, and that jacket follows me through the rest of my time in the Tennessee prisons, and it shows up again many years later for the next 20 years in the federal prisons. Once you get that jacket—and what my jacket says is, "He's a troublemaker, he's a radical, and he's a racial agitator." That, they stuck on me after I got to Nashville, but the seeds for that was in the food strike, because the most radical thing I did and could be done when I got to the state penitentiary was cross the color line. It was basically Jim Crow. Once they pull me up on this shit, put me in seg, that's exactly what, those are the exact words they put on my jacket: "He's a racial agitator." Why is this guy trying to bring people together as if there's something wrong here? Because prison systems are notorious for keeping people divided on racial lines. Crossing that racial line is what I did as a matter of principle, as an already practicing anti-racist from my time with SSOC. Then they stuck me on death row to get me off the compound. I was actually on death row. They had several cells for miscreants that they considered real troublemakers from the population. They put me there. I was in there with brothers from Memphis who gave me an education about white supremacy and killer cops I will never forget. Learning is a two-way street inside, and we were doing political education.

I'm going to cut this short. Then they sent me to Brushy, which was a connection to the old convict-leasing system. I got there in 1970. If I got there in 1965, I would have been mining coal. In 1970 it was a supermax, one of the early supermaxes. We were locked up almost all the time. They cut off all books, all newspapers, no phone calls, restricted, very restricted correspondence: immediate family, lawyer, clergy, that was it. That was another racist place. Every single guard in Brushy Mountain—this is in the East Tennessee mountains—was white. Half the prisoners there were Black. They moved death row and me there at the same time, and most of prisoners on death row were Black. I literally had to fight my way out of that place. I used to tell people, "I'm a Vietnam vet. I was in a war." Before I ever got to this war, I was in a foreign war. I'm a veteran of foreign and domestic wars, because it was a battle to get out of there. Fast forward, I gotta do 20 years here in the feds. Most of it was at Marion and ADX—you know about those places—about 13 years of it in some kind of isolation or solitary confinement. Box-car cells, the epitome of isolation. Right, Eric? You know about them.

In terms of the struggle, where did it start? The day I was captured. Ok, go right to the trials. You don't just go to the penitentiary for the most part, either plea or go to the trial. One way or another, you're gonna be in court, and the battle against the system continues on another level from where I had been, and it starts in the courts. That's the battle for… Oh, shit. Can you hear me?

Eric & Ashanti: Yeah, we can hear you.

Ray Luc Levasseur: So, forming defense committees… I was pro se. There's an old saying by lawyers—like they know everything—a person

who represents themselves have a fool for a client. Well, I represent myself on paper, but what I was really representing in a co-defendant trial—there was seven of us in the first trial, eight in the second—I was representing everything we had fought for and what we represented politically and in principle. When you go pro se, you can do that, and the biggest case they had against us we won. I mean, we were charged with two RICO counts and sedition. They were looking to bury me and others forever, and we won that case. The battle starts there, because when they pack you off to the joint after you done the trials, you better have some kind of support network into place, and the start of that was in the legal proceedings. And they sent me directly to Marion, and this is post-1983 Marion, it's a lockdown joint, 23 hours a day, when I got there, in your cell. My usual toolbox was gone, and of course anybody who knows my history knows some of the stuff that was in my toolbox, so I had to find another way to continue to struggle and to connect. Fortunately, that budding network that we helped build during the legal cases, which transverse five years of cases, followed us inside to some degree. We had supporters that we could work with. I had to write. That was the key: a pencil, a pen. It became enormously important for me and my co-defendants, and I like to think it made a contribution to the ongoing struggles on the streets. I wrote prolifically for quite a long time. I wrote one of the first, the first really published, widely-spread article outside of mainstream media about ADX.

Eric King: In *Prison Legal News*.

Ray Luc Levasseur: Yeah. Disarmed from whatever you armed yourself with on the street, it changes inside. I was fortunate that we had supporters on the street—this is, you know, pre-internet, and everything, up to a point—to take those writings and developments concerning us and amplify and widely distribute it as much as possible. The reason I first heard of Ann Hansen was because there were groups in Canada doing the same thing for political prisoners up there. This was an important network and was an important method for me to communicate. For somebody like Leonard Peltier or Oscar Lopez [Rivera], it was art. Tom Manning, art. There's different ways it can be done. With Marilyn [Buck], poetry. There's any number of ways that you have to keep your spirit and your politics alive and relevant somehow, and that was the way we did it.

I think the most important action we took as political prisoners during my time at Marion was we did a work refusal. They had it set up where they would not release you from Marion until you went to a pre-transfer unit that made military hardware. We drew the line and said, "We will not do that as a condition for a transfer to somewhere else." We weren't there on disciplinary charges, they had just sent us there because of our jackets, we were all radical, and so we refused it. Me, Tom Manning, Mutulu Shakur, Oscar Lopez Rivera, and others. We refused that work, and then we ended up in ADX.

I want to amplify, just reiterate, what Ashanti said. Through all this is study, political education, physical conditioning, all of it. The one time of year that I always see that happen, when I was inside—and I got out in August from Atlanta, and I did it with Mutulu and the other conscious brothers before I left—is we commemorate Black August throughout the prison system, state or federal, which involves fasting, which involves political education, which involves physical exercise, as much as you can do it, together. It's commemorating the sacrifices of those Black freedom fighters, like George Jackson, Jonathan Jackson, and others before them and after them, and it continues to this day.

Eric King: Thank you. Brilliant. It turns out not only were all of us married in prison, but we were all placed inside the US federal supermaxes, either one or both of them, so that is also interesting.

In the '60s, '70s, and '80s—this isn't a question I've listed, but it's something I'm curious about—we saw more direct action. We saw bank expropriations. We saw people putting their freedom on the line, I feel, for the liberation struggle. Why do you, if you have an opinion, why do you think that has vanished? Why do you think we do not see that sort of militant action anymore? Ashanti, if you want to go first, brother.

Ashanti Alston: That's a question that is always on my mind. To explain why it's always on my mind... The '60s and '70s I still feel like, man, that was such a period for me to come of age from 14 to 16 to 17. Me and Jihad Abdul Mamil, we joining the Black Panther Party. It was such a time to be alive, it was just in so many ways magical. You didn't have all the distractions, I guess, as today. You had to deal with this struggle. You saw that the Civil Rights Movement was getting beat down. You could turn on that television, it wasn't but maybe six channels on that television, you're going to see what these fascists are doing to the Civil Rights, the

non-violent Civil Rights Movement. But it's also the point where Black Power is coming into being. Stokely Carmichael's voice. H. Rap Brown, Jamil Al-Amin, who's now…

Eric King: …still in prison! God.

Ashanti Alston: Yeah, back in prison. They were raising more of the Malcolm X spirit, in the sense of, "We want to be free." Black Power also was directing us towards, "What does self-determination look like? How might we actually take over our communities, the institutions, etc?" It gave more of a concrete picture of, "What are we fighting for here?" Not integration. Now we beginning to explore socialism, Mao Tse-Tung, communism, and the Black Panther Party having to read Karl Marx, and then Frantz Fanon, and all these other folks. It made us see more of the reality of this monster we're facing, that it could not be changed, it could not be even modified. This monster has to be challenged, and we have to build the kind of revolutionary movements that can, like George Jackson says, bring it to its knees. I don't know how that sounds to other people, but when you know your history, when you know what this country on the back of Turtle Island has did to Indigenous nations, what it has and continues to do, what it has did to African people and continues to do, what it had did to the Mexicans and others who come here. This is not something you try to reform. You see the necessity, even us as teenagers, of fighting. Develop the capacity to fight. The great thing about the Panther Party was that fight took the form of survival programs as well as liberation schools. The survival programs were so key because it was pretty much telling people, "We can feed ourselves." The free health clinics was saying, "We can take care of our own health issues." The political education classes was like, "If the schools are not going to teach us what we really need to know, then we need to do that." That was that self-determination nationalist attitude. We knew that there had been other efforts—when we talk about Nat Turner and all the other folks—we knew that there were those who did fight back by any means necessary.

[Eric King holds up the book, *John Brown The Hero*, to the camera.]

Right on. It's the same thing with the guy now that speaks on Palestine a lot, Norman Finklestein. The thing he talks about the Nat Turner rebellion, and he says clearly, like that was a pretty vicious thing that he and the crew did, but it was an act of rebellion.

Eric King: …an act of necessity.

Ashanti Alston: An act of necessity. He went to what the Abolitionist movement leaders were putting out in their papers and in their talks to give it some perspective, and, basically, what the Abolitionist movement was telling people was like, "We told you things like this were going to happen, because you have these people enslaved." Norman Finklestein was comparing it to the open-air prison in Palestine—Gaza—and it's like a prison break. It's really great, and he continues to do it even now when you hear him talk. But that was what we were trying to get across also to people. Don't call us crazy because we are trying to develop the capacity to be free, which will mean that we have got to confront this monster with all means necessary. All means necessary. The Black Panther Party, I feel, came closest to bringing that into fruition, because it started off Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, but also in its growing process understood this aspect of armed struggle. We need to defend our communities.

Eric King: *We.* We don't need to rely on the police to do it, *we* need to do it.

Ashanti Alston: Because, clearly, the police is an occupying force. That language at the time was key. When Eldridge Cleaver and them talked about this being an internal colony, and we're inside the mother country, he was giving us a way to see what this settler colonialism was. To see that was also to see our struggle on a much broader level, compared with the African liberation movements, the liberation movements coming out of Asia, the revolutionary struggles even in Germany, Japan, and other places. We may get into that with the solidarity stuff, too. But those of us in the Black Panther Party who went underground, we had always understood that we have to develop the capacity to defend ourselves. Who do we come up against? All those bourgeois negroes and others who want to stay connected to the monster, and want to convince our people like "Yo, do not follow them crazy people. Stay with the monster. They're going to give us a few trinkets. They're going to give us a little bit more." Let me tell you what happened, quickly. After the rebellion in my hometown—this is '67, this is what pretty much brought me into the movement, I'm like 13 or 14 years old—the rebellion in Plainfield, when Black folks took over the Black community, because they went and got crates of M1 rifles. They was able to hold it for a week. 13 or 14 year old Ashanti was like, "Oh my God, this is blowing my mind that we are able to do this." But then, after the National Guard came in with the tanks and

took it over, the first thing that the city government did, once they was contained, was to put some swimming pools in the playgrounds and they called that, you know, y'all should be satisfied with that now. Plainfield ain't been right since. To this day. Even afterwards with Black mayors. It ain't been right since, because we could not hold that self-determination, that Black Power perspective, because of how that Black middle class wanted to just fit in, they wanted to integrate. The lesson we should know from that is that we can't integrate into this poisonous monstrous empire. We have really got to figure out that the way forward is to cut it loose. Cut it loose in every way we can.

Eric King: Thank you. Shout out Plainfield!

Ray Luc, do you have an opinion or a thought on why this generation, particularly with what's going on, why we've seen such a decrease in militant action or direct action compared to when you guys were coming up?

Ray Luc Levasseur: I agree with a lot with Ashanti said. Time, place, condition. It was a much different time. During our earlier political activist years, it was a much different time in the world. Che [Guevara] said, "One, two, three, many Vietnams," and I had come out of Vietnam, and that seemed like a real possibility. Ashanti, you're talking about 1967, I was in Vietnam in 1967, and we got an old Life Magazine over there, a very popular American weekly at the time, showing pictures of Detroit after the '67 rebellion. I saw that, and when I was in 'Nam I had done a lot of flying in helicopters, and the devastation I saw in the pages of the Life Magazine looked similar to what I was seeing in parts of Vietnam. I went up to Detroit to look at it myself after I got back, as I was stationed in Fort Campbell, and I could see there was a real war going on here, too. When I got out in 2004, one of the things I noticed about people or the general climate was I felt people were fearful. You know, this is following 9/11. I was inside during 9/11. But there was a sense that people have a sense of fear, insecurity, anxiety that I hadn't sensed 20 years earlier, when I went in. It is a real challenge.

I mean, I'm involved in Palestine work here right now in Maine. What I'm seeing in Maine is certainly a lot of energy has been generated around supporting Palestine, for different reasons among different people, but there's real potential there, for this movement that's happening around this country right now to develop to the level it was around South Africa 25 years ago. But that is an exception. I don't have a firm answer for what you're saying. One of the questions I get, I used to get a lot, not so much now, but I did over the years—it indicates to me why people are thinking different than they were decades earlier. There's a sense about people… They were kind of overwhelmed by the power of the system. They would say, "Well, how how can you challenge something like this? It seems like everything that we do or try doesn't get anywhere, because it's just too big, it's too powerful."

The other one was about sacrifice. If you go up against this system there are consequences.

Eric King: Serious consequences.

Ray Luc Levasseur: We on this panel right now are demonstrating what some of those consequences are. But there's a lot of other consequences. I've heard you, Eric, talk about an organization I've been very involved with with—Rosenberg Fund for Children.

Eric King: Love 'em.

Ray Luc Levasseur: This is an organization that supports children of political prisoners. If you go and you look at the parents of these children, the activists, how many different ways the government can make you pay for your activism, whether you're an immigration activist, a climate activist, an anti-fascist activist, and the different levels of activism, depending on where you are, and there's other factors, but there's a whole lot of people that are paying a price for their activism. It scares a lot of people. I know we got a ways to go yet, so I don't want to take any more time on that question.

Eric King: Thank you. Thank you so much. Ashanti, you wanted us to come back, you had a followup.

Ashanti Alston: Yeah. Listen. It's so funny, because when Ray mentioned that Life Magazine, I think I got the one that he was talking about, but I was just going through them, I can't find it, right? Because what I would do is like, I go to thrift stores, I go to these different places, and I would actually look for—they may have collections of old Life magazines or

Newsweek magazines—so I look for those in that time period, because I want to have things I could show people.

This is September 1970 around Angela Davis. [*Ashanti holds a magazine depicting Angela Davis and the title "The Making of a Fugitive" to the screen.*]

This is March 1968. Ho Chi Minh! [*Ashanti holds a magazine depicting Ho Chi Minh and the title "Behind the Peace Feelers" to the screen.*]

This is 1970, June 1970. [*Ashanti holds a magazine depicting a dozen of Palestinian "fedayeen" (guerrilla fighters) in uniform and formation and the title "Palestinian Arabs: new pride and unity" to the screen.*]

How long these struggles have been going, for so long, and the reason I go for them is because I want to at some point have a place where people—with some of the old Panther stuff that I have, too—so that people can actually see some things and maybe read some of the things from the Panther paper, and I got more, I even got a Nation of Islam *Muhammad Speaks* stuff. But you get to see what the articles were talking about, what was the focus.

But what I had wanted to get back to around here, like the difference between then and now. I do think fear, yes, is a big, big part. Because I think that once they had captured a lot of us, what was put in place? Not only more militarized police. But on a cultural level, television had beaucoup cop shows, beaucoup cop shows millions and millions of people would watch every week. Because in the cop shows the cops always got the criminal, and in many instances the criminals was folks like me and Ray, right? People are getting convinced—like they captured us—don't you try to do the same thing, because we'll get you, too. You cannot escape us. I went in '74, and when I got out at the end of '85, I'm living with my lawyer until he can work it out. My lawyer had a close relationship with a lot of Black high school students in New Haven that had basketball skills, and what he wanted to do was make sure, if they got scholarships, he wanted to make sure they had the best scholarship. He would go in there to help them, to make sure they wasn't getting screwed around and stuff. But one of the young high school students—you know, because he would be around the legal office—and I just, out of curiosity, asked him, "What do you know about the Black Panther Party?" And he asked me, "Was it a martial arts group?"

Eric King: That's from your interview.

Ashanti Alston: ...which helped me to understand what our enemy does in order to recoup, to recover from, that revolutionary period. We was on the edge...

Eric King: So close.

Ashanti Alston: ...of revolution. It felt like in so many ways they know what they're doing. On the militarized level and on that cultural level, they was recouping. I think the generations after that showed that, and not to rule out also the influx of drugs into the community around this same time, too. Because when many of us got out and saw the proliferation of street organizations that was involved with this murderous drug game, oh, this is way more than we know how to handle. Way more. All these things are still with us today. That's why I wanted to get back to that, because we talking about today. There's real, legitimate reasons, but we still got to figure out how to confront the fear, because if we don't, they continue. I don't want to hear all that talk about the empire is on its last legs. I get tired of that. People make predictions and all that shit. No. And if it is, who's going to be the ones that's going to really suffer if it really does. It's going to hit us on the bottom. We got to figure out how to still organize, fight this thing on multi-dimensional levels, because the trauma... Just like what the Palestinians is going through now... The trauma it's intergenerational, and it's ongoing.

Ray Luc Levasseur: Can I just add one quick thing? People are more likely to step up into various kinds of activism around various issues—all of which is needed, that's clear. Hasn't been that long since we saw these huge Black Lives Matter demonstrations, right? A good example of what I'm talking about how the system operates and what we need to do is Stop Cop City, all right. You're talking about intimidating people. If we—and Ashanti knows this, because we've been doing this work for decades—if we don't support the activists who are jailed and imprisoned, then we're not worth shit, okay. Every movement that has succeeded in challenging the system and making some advance are those movements and revolutions that support, have supported their prisoners, the people that get locked up. You make a sacrifice, you can lose your life, or you can be

imprisoned, or you can some suffer some other consequences, as I mentioned earlier.

You're talking about the struggle in Palestine? They don't forget their prisoners in Palestine, anybody that's fallen in the struggle in Palestine, and they never have, and they never will, and that's part of what makes their movement and spirit so strong. If you look at the Irish independence struggle, same thing. If you go back to South Africa in the anti-apartheid years. Nelson Mandela. There was a lot of others, whether it was ANC or PAC. They didn't leave their prisoners behind. They kept support networks going for them. They didn't abandon them. It's been a constant struggle in this country to get recognition of political prisoners and activists that get jailed and don't let them get abandoned. What Cop City's trying to do is: you better abandon them or we're going to have your ass, too. I know one of the Stop Cop City defendants here in Maine, and I can tell you that after talking with him in-depth a couple of times, he was pretty well shell-shocked when he came out of the RICO indictments against them. We have a little-known case going on right now in Southern New Hampshire, where three young women being charged with felonies for what is nothing but a little bit of vandalism at an Elbit plant in Southern New Hampshire, Elbit being a major military supplier of Israel. You can't let these people be forgotten. If people see that they get absolutely no support when they step up and do something, they're going to be less likely to do something. It doesn't mean that they don't see the issue and they don't think something needs to be done, but they're concerned about what happens if they do it.

Eric King: That's a great point. Something that I think my generation of 30 to 40 year-olds noticed was when the Green Scare happened, those people got smashed. They got smashed with sentences that my generation did not think still happened. I think that scared a lot of people away, when you see the 15 to 30 year sentence range happen, like Marius Mason, and Eric McDavid, and Jake Conroy, all those guys, all those people.

I want to switch base real quick and jump to what's happening right now on college campuses that we're seeing, and that is college kids coming together, doing encampments, and facing extreme police responses in some cases. Here in Denver, my boss Z Williams and the co-director of our legal firm, Claire, both were arrested just for being at an encmpament, just for showing up to support the students. I was wondering if either of you two had views or had opinions on the positive aspects of the Palestinian movement, where we're lacking, or anything in between that you would like to talk about.

Ashanti Alston: Well, one, I'mma tell you I haven't been this excited in a long time, with the support that's been coming out for the Palestinian people, you know, occupied Palestine. I think what has surprised me so much about it is not only the protest but especially, I'll say, white Jews, young Jews, but I know it's across the board, who are disconnecting zionism from Judaism, breaking off that propaganda. Who would have thought? I mean, who would have thought? You know, because the zionism in the United States is really strong. That hold on consciousness is really strong. And to see these young folks challenging that and older folks, too, it warms my heart. They're coming out. And this is anti-war, when one says against genocide, it's because of that war, that genocide war on the Palestinian people. It's at a great time. My fears is it's going to be siphoned off into this presidential election. If all these folks who are against genocide and for the Palestinian people to be free, to be liberated, does that stop there? I think one of the things I felt during the anti-war movement back in the day, was that once that war kind of concluded, there was still issues that we were fighting for: Black folks fighting for liberation, Indigenous folks fighting for sovereignty, Puerto Ricans fighting for independence, you know, the Chicanos fighting for the liberation of Aztlan, the workers are fighting, the women are fighting. Does it stop there? That's my concern, that what we're doing for Palestine... We have our Palestine here, yes, in this empire that's on the back of Turtle Island.

I'm really excited about one of the books I'm almost finished with now is Muhammad Abdou's book *Islam and Anarchy*. Really great, really great book. Really great. Who I've known for like 20 years, and I think he's been working on this this book for 20 years, but he brings up some really great... His starting point is 1492. Because of his experience in Egypt—he's an African Anarchist from Egypt—so he's got the experience of the so-called Arab Spring. He lived in Canada, so he has that experience of developing deep relationship with the struggles there, particularly the Indigenous struggles, and connected with struggles here as well. He's on the ground. He's not really the academic only guy. He is really a revolutionary. He's really an anarchist. The thing that he brings up that I think is key for folks now, not only those who are Jews, but those who are

immigrants here—a term he uses is settlers of color—are those immigrants who come here looking for a better life, but they buy into empire. I think one the things that can help this expression of massive resistance now in the United States is that there's got to be a consciousness that deepens around this is Turtle Island, and there's still a struggle going on here. There is African people who are brought here enslaved.

If consciousness is not there, then people will continue to fight for a better America. Make America live up to its ideals and all of that bullshit. Because when folks who come here do that, then you have to accept that you're doing it on the backs of those original sins that empire has committed and it continues. Empire is not just something that happened in the past, it is a daily continuing thing that just goes on. One of the ways to break it is to develop a consciousness where you know, you learn how you tie into this madness, because Muhammad also talks about micro-fascism, and the micro-fascism is also those ways that we internalize our oppression or we internalize the values of the empire. In our struggle to get rid of empire, we have to also figure out how to get it out of us in our daily interaction. He talks about the political and the ethical. That has become very important for me, because I want us to avoid reproducing different hierarchical systems, different systems. That is me. That is still me. A lot of his work focuses on that, so that we know that it's just not getting something external away, but realizing that it's in us, too. It's in us, too. If we don't figure out how to do it in that multi-dimensional sense, we could possibly win on one level, like many struggles have, but just end up reproducing some other oppressive madness that's using revolutionary rhetoric.

So, Palestine is in us as well. We're Palestine here as well. And we got to figure out how to get this madness off of us and into the dust bin of history.

Eric King: Thank you. Thank you for sharing that. Ray, do you you have any views on this?

Ray Luc Levasseur: Just briefly, yeah, I'm pumped about it, too, about the student movement that we've seen rise, and it's a really solid example of international solidarity. I like the cross-pollination of it with—like Ashanti mentioned—it's not just students, it's, interestingly enough, tied into labor, because in the California University system and some of the other big university systems, a lot of those who have joined the campus demonstrations are actually union members on campus, and then you got community people also. I think that's important, and of course it is student leadership, and students have had a historic role in this country and in other countries, in terms of social change and challenging the system. The future really is with youth. Nothing would please me more than a bunch of students asking Ashanti and I to politely step aside while they kept marching. You know, as a much older activist, I don't believe in taking up space a younger activist should be taking up. It's a spark, and it could be built on, and I'm hoping and cautiously optimistic that they will continue to build on it. It's a training ground for the future. The last point is that the seed is there, like in a lot of the Palestine work that's going on now, for long-term solidarity. The long term. And, of course, just one part of that is going to be BDS. We got to boycott, divest, sanction, just as it was during the anti-apartheid movement. When I say they're building something, that work those students are doing, it has a real potential to go long-term and join with a lot of others for that kind of solidarity work that's got to be done once the killing stops as it's happening today.

Eric King: I'd like to take a second to rep Bread and Rose's Legal Center, and thank them for all the work they do supporting the Palestinian protesters and the trans liberation struggle here in Denver.

Ray, you brought up BDS, the boycott, divestment, and sanction movement, and that's often something that I try advocating for to shut down the prison system for the abolitionist cause. If we cut off the financial head of the snake, the rest of it can be disintegrated into community-based healing and those sort of tactics. Do either of you two have have an opinion on what could be done to change or get rid of the prison system in America?

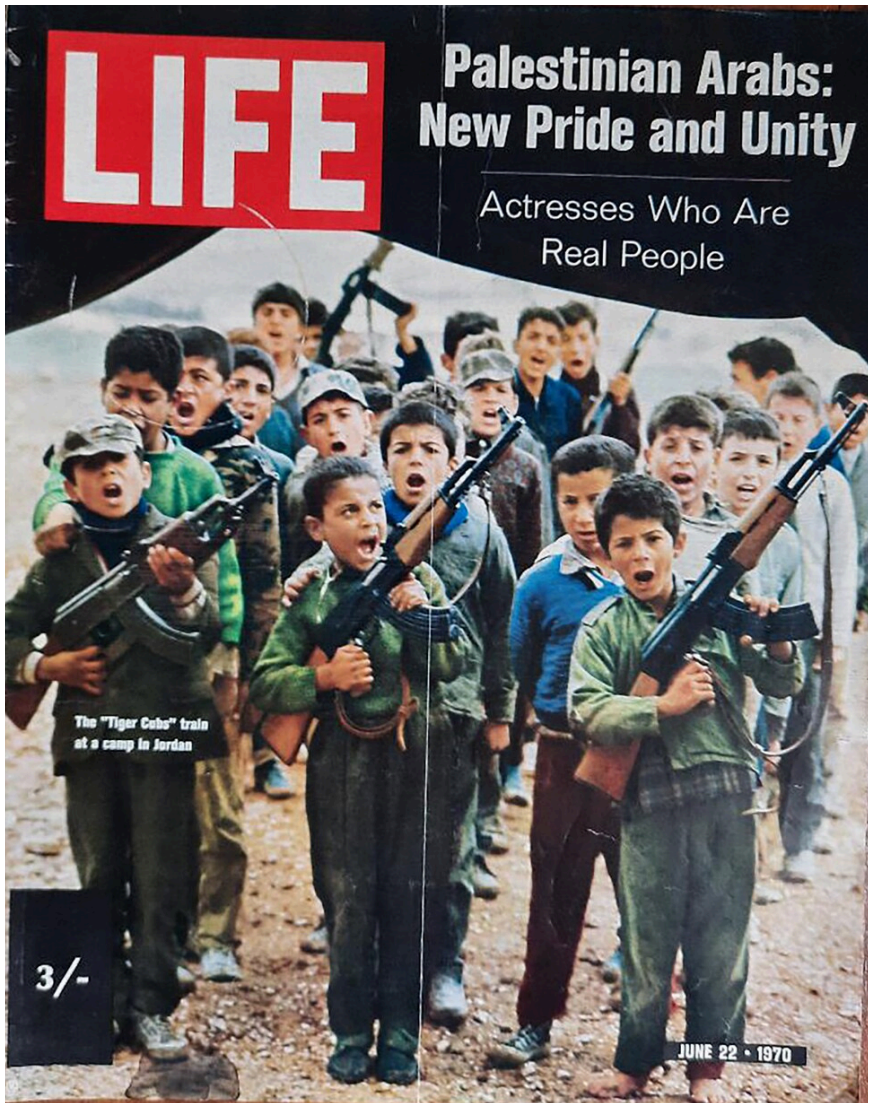
Ray Luc Levasseur: I'll tell you one step. This is a multistep thing, okay? Abolish a system... Oh, that was a Freudian slip, I guess. I said "abolish the system," not prisons. Well, the fact is, if you want to get rid of this gulag as it exists in the United States of America today, it requires system change. I'm an abolitionist. It's an ideal of mine. But how do you do that? I've been seeing a lot of problems and issues rising up among the prison abolition thing and the police abolition thing. I actually was involved in a panel discussion around security abolition, which is get rid of the FBI and the

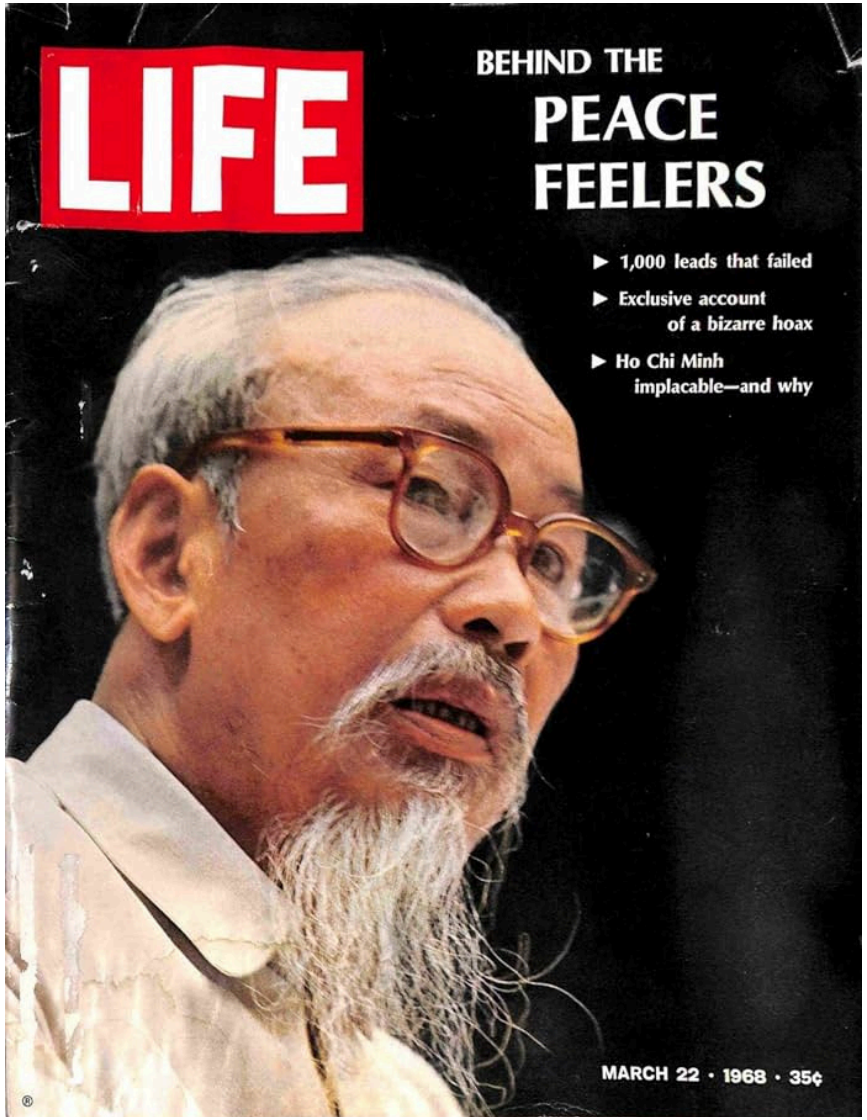
CIA and all the rest of it. I didn't initiate it. I was asked to speak at it. But you're not going to do that without smashing capitalism and uprooting white supremacy. That is the number one issue. Think local and act global. Remember that. I've been involved in prison work, mass incarceration, solitary confinement stuff for years in Maine, as a founder of the main prison advocacy coalition before I left after eight years, because it got way too reformist for me. Just a little local project here in a place like Maine, in Penobscot County here, Wabanaki land. Of course they're going to name a jail after a Native American right? Penobscot. They should put on the outside on that that's because disproportionately number of Native Americans are inside that fucking jail. They want to double the size of that jail. They want to build a new jail twice the size of the one they got now. Five years ago they came up with a plan, an architectural plan, to do exactly that. But they need the money, which requires a referendum, the county voters got to vote on it. We tore that plan apart. I got involved in this. I thought, one way or another, a year, either way it goes, new jail or no new jail. Every plan they put up we have stopped. Now we're in year number five. The point is how can you do anything about the largest prison system in the world or talk realistically about abolition if you cannot stop this expansion of it, larger prisons, larger jails.

You want to see a generational thing? Just very quickly. Ashanti and I both talk about Marion, one of the real shitholes in this gulag system. The architect that built Marion prison back in 1963, I think it was, to replace Alcatraz, is one of the architects on the bid to double the size of this new jail right here in my neighborhood. Over a half century later these motherfuckers have been sucking all this money up. You know, what kind of resume is that? But if you go on their website and look, they got all the nonprofit industrial complex rhetoric down flat. They say they're going to have "trauma sensitive" cells and all that shit, right? But the point is—and probably nobody listening to this knows where Penobscot county is or the Penobscot people for one thing—but this jail thing, it's a small project, but you take that, and you amplify and multiply it, what if every little town, every small city, was able to do the same thing. We could make some headway. I think that's just a practical step, that is almost a prerequisite step, as part of moving towards abolition.

Eric King: Thank you. Ashanti, do you have a view on this?

Ashanti Alston: Yeah, well, I'm definitely an abolitionist. I have some





concerns, but I'm going to just tie it into this and not really get too deep into it. Like many things, this system has the ability to co-opt, regurgitate, and spit something else back out to us as if it was their idea. I think that has been happening, and I think other abolitionists who have been developing this for years see the same thing, that this thing with abolition is getting distorted and watered down to the point where you got many people who will use the word abolition, they're abolitionist, you know, "Defund the Police," and all that other stuff. I'm not really that big on the defund the police, because I think that doesn't show any understanding of the role of the police. That they ain't gonna sit around and like, "Oh, you gonna take our job from us? No, no, no. We're killers. We're shooters. We control you. That's our job." No. I think people can be kind of naive. I am more for tying abolition into real grassroots organizing that people can see the need to take back their lives. I like the initiative coming from the People's Senate...

Eric King: This is Jalil [Al-Amin]?

Ashanti Alston: That's Spirit of Mandela, which is putting forth a sort of dual power possibility of people developing the capacities to develop their own power in opposition to the white supremacist capitalist powers that be. I really like Dhoruba Bin Wahad's idea that he's been pushing in terms of developing a united front against fascism as we tried back in the days of fascism. I think what is so key about that is that Dhoruba is very analytical and pointed into the role of the technologies of political control. He sees. He's trying to get people to see the role of the police in a much broader picture that we need to get ready for that. I would encourage people to go to the Spirit of Mandela website. You can, if you put in united front against fascism, put Dhoruba's name in there, you'll see where he has the conversation with Jill Stein and Cornell West. Both have a united front aspect, and both want to reach masses of people from different communities from different perspectives. But to be clear about how we need to focus on the role of the frontline forces who are going to always be there to prevent us from developing this capacity to transform this madness. So, if it's there, then it's less of a worry for me about, "Is the language going to be shifted off into something else and becomes meaningless again?" Can we stay focused on the need to bring this empire down as even the best way to help stop the genocides that's going on in Palestine and in Africa and other different places? But we don't really talk about the genocides in Africa as much, but those of us out of the Black

Liberation struggle, we do. But if we want a real good way, like Che Guevara would say, we're in the brain of this Empire.

Eric King: The belly!

Ashanti Alston: I say the brain. Let's get that aneurism going. Bring this thing down, so that the role that the United States Empire plays in world oppressions can get disrupted, and to help other people to develop the spaces in other countries and other struggles to free themselves. I'm more concerned with the abolitionist rhetoric today and with a lot of people that are coming to the fore. There's no deep class analysis, there's no deep race analysis, there's no idea of a settler colonial situation here. Without them things, then you really talking about, "Oh, I want to make America live up to its ideals." I don't want to make America live up to its ideals, because *this is the ideal*, regardless of its rhetoric. What we see now is the best that it can do and the best that it wants to do. We deserve better.

Eric King: This is going to be our last question here. Ray and Ashanti, if either of you two have any projects you're working on that you want to talk about, anything you just want to get off your chest or just get out there, I ask you to please take this time to do that now.

Ashanti Alston: The work of Jericho. It's political prisoners, y'all. I mean, really. We got to be there. We got to be there for them folks that take them chances, take them risks. Like Tortuguita in the Stop Cop City thing in Atlanta. Was he expecting to die on that day? No. Was all those people expecting to get arrested under new versions of RICO? No. And Martin Luther King Jr., how many times was he arrested? We have to be more real about that. The other thing that I want to say is, I'm an anarchist. All of you folks out there who are anarchists, I feel we got a lot to offer, and I feel like, man, we need to start talking more and being able to have more of a presence and input into shaping these struggles as they unfold. I'm asking y'all, let's figure out how to make that happen.

Eric King: Thank you! Ray?

Ray Luc Levasseur: I definitely would encourage people to look into Spirit of Mandela, People's Senate. There is some conversations going on about building a united front against fascism. It's another thing I see around the Palestine work a lot of potential to bring a lot of different groups and people together, and in addition to long-term solidarity work, I think this could generate new ideas on which way forward, especially when you get a lot of young people involved. I stopped trying to deliver a hardline party line a while back, so I want to leave you with a little parable. Very short. I've got much longer ones, but I'll spare you. I've lived and operated in huge cities for a long time, but most of us aren't in New York City or LA and Chicago, so I kind of gear what I say a lot of times to the people that live in less populated areas. There are many of us in small towns, suburbs, small cities. Providence is not too big if I remember. Right, Ashanti?

Ashanti Alston: Not too big.

Ray Luc Levasseur: Speaking with people, they raise a lot of issues about, you know, you can say "united front against fascism." Sounds good, but how do we get from here to there? You can identify the problem fairly easily—smash capitalism, imperialism, and white supremacy—and you're off in the right direction. But how do you get there? So, without coming down with a party line, I don't represent a particular sectarian party. Coming from a working background, I made my living as a carpenter—as a lot of things—but up until I got old and retired, I made my living as a carpenter. Not a hugely skilled carpenter, I'm a frame carpenter. But that means I can build it from bottom to top. When a dude hired me on the job, I was trying to get any kind of job I could, because I was on parole and I needed a job, I needed money. I said, "Well, I'll be a carpenter's helper," because I didn't have any skill at all, you know. "Lug this, lug that, I'll give you good day's work." And he says, "We don't want no carpenter's helper. Everybody is a carpenter with just different skill levels." And he gave me some advice that I've extrapolated to use in political organizing and advocacy. He says, "How many people can just go out there and build a house? It would be overwhelming for the average person. You gonna build a house? No, you get somebody that's a carpenter or a contractor to do it." He says, "Don't try to build a house until you've built a shed first." I live in the country, I've built quite a few sheds among other things, right? So, unskilled as I was, before I developed those skills, I built a shed, because to build a shed requires the same basic principles and blueprint as building a house. The basic framing, the walls, the floor, the stairs, put a window in, a door in, a roof, a gable roof, shingles. It's an oversimplification, I understand, but you will learn the basics of how to build what they call the good bones of a house. When you look at an old house, if you look at it, you look what kind of bones it's got. So, take that and put it into

community organizing terms. Don't be overwhelmed. We're going to build a united front against fascism. You want to deal with white supremacy? You want to deal with Palestine? Whatever. Start with what you've got to work with. Build a shed first. Get a program going. Get a few people together. Get things started. I first got a taste of that because I was with a group, SCAR, that patented ourselves to a degree after the Black Panther Party, although we were predominantly white, but we took seriously the survival programs that the Panthers did. You have to start smaller to get people involved in working on their own to see what it takes to get to a higher level, survival pending revolution, without giving up your politics. That's my parting suggestion for the day.

Ashanti Alston: That's old man wisdom, right there.

Eric King: Like anyone that talks to me on social media, what I always leave people with is, "Please write a prisoner." Please write a prisoner. Whether they're a political prisoner, a social prisoner, whether they're in the lower custody level or the highest custody level, please write someone inside. Please start a project with those inside. See what you can do to help them and help make their time and their comrades' time inside better.

Ashanti, brother, I thank you so much. Ray, thank you so much. It was a real honor talking to both of you.

Ashanti Alston: Thank you, Eric.

Ray Luc Levasseur: Thank you, Libertie.

Ashanti Alston: Free all political prisoners.

Eric King: All of them.

Ray Luc Levasseur: And Free Palestine!

Libertie Valance: Thanks y'all. This has been an incredible conversation. If you haven't already picked up a copy of *Rattling the Cages*, definitely want to encourage you to grab that from your local radical bookstore or direct from the publisher at AK Press or from Firestorm if you don't have local. Also want to appreciate Josh Davidson for helping to make this series possible. Ray, Ashanti, thank you so much.

Ashanti Alston: And Eric, you know, we proud of you, man. We proud of you.

Ray Luc Levasseur: Good to see you out.

Safiya Bukhari — Safiya had a long history of revolutionary struggle. While in college, Safiya began volunteering with the Black Panther Party (BPP) Free Breakfast program. In 1969, she witnessed an officer harassing a Panther who was selling papers in Times Square and was arrested when she told the officer the Panther had a right to disseminate political literature. These incidents led her to join the BPP. She worked out of the Party's Harlem office, becoming in charge of Information and Communications for the East Coast Panthers. After being subpoenaed to testify about the Black Liberation Army (BLA) in April 1974, she went underground with the BLA to avoid testifying. On January 25, 1975, Safiya was captured after a shooting in VA that left a fellow BLA member dead and another injured. Even though she had a license to open carry in public, she was charged with illegal possession of a weapon, felony murder, and attempted robbery, and was sentenced to 40 years. Safiya escaped from prison on New Year's Eve 1976, after one month of frequent hemorrhaging for which she was not allowed to see a doctor, but was captured two months later. While imprisoned, Bukhari and fellow inmates founded a program called Mothers Inside Loving Kids (MILK) to prevent the separation of children from incarcerated mothers. After releasing on parole in 1983, Safiya immediately threw herself into political prisoners support work. Safiya founded the Free Mumia Abu-Jamal Coalition in NYC in 1992, and by 1998 she, along with others, founded the Jericho Movement to free all political prisoners. Safiya was also the vice president of the Republic of New Afrika. Safiya passed away on August 24, 2003.

Erica Huggins — While in university, both Ericka and her husband John Huggins were inspired to leave school and join the Black Panther Party. Her motivation came from a Ramparts magazine article she read that discussed the cruel treatment of Huey P. Newton while incarcerated. A picture in the article depicted Newton shirtless, with a bullet wound in his stomach, strapped to a hospital gurney. In 1967, the couple arrived in Los Angeles and joined the Black Panther Party. Eventually, her husband John Huggins, became leader of the Los Angeles Chapter of the Black Panther Party. While she was at home with her three week old daughter, John was assassinated on January 17, 1969, on the UCLA campus along with Panther Bunchy Carter by COINTELPRO infiltrators. Following John's funeral, she moved to his birthplace to open up a new Black Panther Party branch. She led this new chapter along two other women, Kathleen Neal Cleaver and Elaine Brown. While involved with the Black Panthers, Huggins held several positions: both an editor and writer for the Black Panther Intercommunal News Service, director of the party's Oakland Community School, and a member of the party's Central Committee. After being released from prison and all charges being requited, *Insights and Poems*, a book of poetry, co-written by Huggins and Huey P. Newton, founder of the Black Panther Party, was released in 1975.

Bobby Seal — Bobby was a co-founder of the Black Panther Party with Huey P. Newton. While working at the North Oakland Neighborhood Anti-Poverty Center, Bobby met Bobby Hutton, who later became the first recruited member of the Black Panther Party. Strongly inspired by the teachings of Malcolm X, who had been assassinated in 1965, Bobby and Huey joined together in October 1966 to create the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, which adopted the late activist's slogan "Freedom by any means necessary." Bobby and Huey together wrote the doctrines "What We Want Now!" "the practical, specific things we need and that should exist," and "What We Believe," which outlines the philosophical principles of the Black Panther Party, which were part of the party's Ten-Point Program. Bobby was one of the original "Chicago Eight" defendants charged with conspiracy and inciting a riot in the wake of the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. While in prison, Bobby said, "To be a Revolutionary is to be an Enemy of the state. To be arrested for this struggle is to be a Political Prisoner." Though he was never convicted in the case, on November 5, 1969, Judge Hoffman sentenced Bobby to four years in prison for 16 counts of contempt. While serving his four-year sentence, Bobby was tried in 1970 as part of the New Haven Black Panther trials. In 1968, Bobby wrote *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton.*

George Jackson — George was a revolutionary prisoner and Minister of Defense for the Black Panther Party. During his first years at San Quentin State Prison, where he was imprisoned at age 20 for stealing $70 from a gas station on a sentence of one year to life, George became involved in revolutionary activity, after becoming acquainted with the works of Marx, Lenin, Mao, and Fanon. On January 17, 1970, a prison officer shot and killed three Black prisoners during a set-up fight with members of the Aryan Brotherhood. Following their assassinations, thirteen black prisoners began a hunger strike in the hopes of securing an investigation. A grand jury was convened three days later that exonerated the prison guard after permitting no black prisoners to testify. Thirty minutes after the grand jury decision, another prison guard was thrown off a cell-block tier to his death, and George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo, and John Clutchette—who came to be known as the Soledad Brothers—were indicted. Many revolutionaries would join the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee, such as Angela Davis who would become the leader of the committee and friend to George, who sent her the book *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*. On August 7, 1970, George Jackson's 17-year-old brother Jonathan Jackson burst into a Marin County courtroom with an automatic weapon, freed prisoners three prisoners, including Ruchell Magee, and took a judge, district attorney, and three jurors hostage to demand the release of the Soledad Brothers. Police killed Jonathan, the judge, and wounded three others in the ensuing chase. On August 21, 1971, George pulled a 9 mm pistol from beneath a wig and said: "Gentlemen, the dragon has come," quoting Vietnamese revolutionary Ho Chi Minh, and ordered prisoners' cells opened, escaped to the yard, and was murdered by a guard from a guard tower. George finished writing

the book *Blood in My Eye*, which was published in 1972, just days before his escape and death. *Blood in My Eye* is a masterpiece of urban guerrilla theory, political economy, and theories of armed Black liberation.

Kamau Sadiki — A former member of the Black Liberation Army (BLA), who is currently serving a life sentence for the killing of an Atlanta police officer in 1971. With the US counter-insurgency program COINTELPRO that attempted to neutralize and destroy revolutionary organizations like the Black Panther Party, many members felt they had no choice but to go underground or risk imprisonment and death, which Sadiki did in 1971. In 1973 he was captured as part of a federal stakeout for a bank expropriation and was tried with his co-defendant Assata Shakur—which ended first in a mistrial and after a second trial with a jury acquittal. In 1974, he was tried in another bank expropriation, found guilty, and sentenced to 5 years in prison. During these trials, Assata was pregnant with a child she shared with Sadiki. She would later escape to Cuba. Sadiki's case was part of a renewed campaign during the early 2000's to target former revolutionaries from the 1960s and 70s. Sadiki has claimed his innocence, stating that the government refused to allow testimony that would exonerate him and used his case as a way to pressure Sadiki to help in capturing Assata. Sadiki was convicted and sentenced in 2003. His health continues to deteriorate to this day, and support for his liberation is crucial. *More information:* freekamau.com

National Jericho Movement — Jericho is a movement with the defined goal of gaining recognition of the fact that political prisoners and prisoners of war exist inside of the United States, despite the United States' government's continued denial, and winning amnesty and freedom for these political prisoners. The Jericho Movement grew out of a call for a national march on the White House in the Spring of 1998 by political prisoner Jalil Muntaqim. The call was made in October of 1996 through the Provisional Government–Republic of New Afrika and the New Afrikan Liberation Front, but the organizers decided to use this opportunity to jumpstart a much needed movement to build a national support organization for political prisoners in general. *More information:* www.thejerichomovement.com

IRA — The Irish Republic Army was a revolutionary organization that fought a guerrilla war against British settler-colonialism from 1919 to 1921. The IRA was descended from the Irish Volunteers, founded in 1913, who staged the Easter Rising in 1916, which aimed at ending British rule in Ireland, a rebellion that was brutally suppressed. Following a treaty with the British in 1921 that ended the war of independence, a split occurred within the IRA between members who supported the treaty (Irish National Army), and the majority opposed to the treaty (IRA), who fought a civil war against the Free State Army in 1922–1923, with the intention of creating a fully independent all-Ireland republic. In the decades following the defeat of the IRA, various guerrilla organizations would continue to struggle for independence, such as the eruption of guerrilla warfare during the so-called Troubles from the late 60's to the late 90's. Captured members of the IRA and Irish republican political prisoners waged fierce battles for recognition as political prisoners against the British government, such as the 1981 hunger strike which left Bobby Sands and 9 other prisoners dead from starvation.

Hukbalahap rebellion — The communist Huk Resistance led a 12 year guerrilla campaign against Japanese and American colonialism from 1942 to 1954 in the Phillippines. After the guerrillas liberated the Phillippines from the Japanese, the US-supported government disarmed and arrested the Huks for their attempts to continue a peasant's revolution, who would retreat again into the mountains to continue the struggle as the People's Liberation Army. The Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army, the inheritors of the Huks, have been waging a guerrilla war against the Phillippines state and American support since 1969.

Sundiata Acoli — A New York Black Panther, he endured two years of prison awaiting trial for the Panther 21 Conspiracy Case. He and his comrades were eventually acquitted on all the bogus charges. The case was historic and a classic example of police and government attempting to neutralize organizations by incarcerating their leadership. As a result of this political attack and because of the immense pressure and surveillance from the FBI and local police Sundiata, like many other Panther leaders went "underground" with the Black Liberation Army. On May 2, 1973, Sundiata Acoli, Assata Shakur and Zayd Shakur were ambushed and attacked by state troopers on the New Jersey Turnpike. Assata was wounded and Zayd was killed. During the gun battle a state trooper was shot and killed in self defense. Sundiata was tried in an environment of mass hysteria and convicted, although there was no credible evidence that he killed the trooper or had been involved in the shooting. Sundiata was sentenced to life in prison and was finally granted parole in May 2022 at the age of 85. *More information:* sundiataacoli.org

Rafael Cancel Miranda — A Puerto Rican independentista, revolutionary, and poet. Rafael, along with Lolita Lebrón, Andrés Figueroa Cordero, and Irvin Flores Rodríguez, attacked the House of Representatives in 1954. Rafael joined pro-independence political groups as a youth, after his family survived the Ponce massacre, when police opened fire on a march commemorating the abolition of slavery in Puerto Rico. Rafael was later sentenced to two years in prison for refusing the draft, and upon release self-exiled to Cuba, where he stayed until the Batista coup and was expelled. In New York, he met other Puerto Rican independentistas and became involved in the attack on the House, a continuation of the pro-independence uprisings that began in 1950 in Puerto Rico. Rafael received a prison sentence of 85 years, which was commuted in 1979, after 25 years. After his commutation, Rafael authored nine books and remained

active in the struggle for Puerto Rican independence. Rafael passed away in San Juan, Puerto Rico on March 2, 2020.

Herman Bell — A former member of both the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army, and he was imprisoned for forty-five years. Herman was captured in New Orleans in 1973, and eventually he, Jalil Muntaqim, and Albert Nuh Washington were convicted of attacks on police. Herman was also implicated in the San Francisco 8 case and pleaded guilty to a lesser offense. He spent five years imprisoned in the federal system, in the Marion control unit for two of those years, before spending decades in various New York State maximum security prisons. While imprisoned he was committed to community work, and he is a founding member of the Victory Gardens Project and the Certain Days Collective. He was released in 2018, after his eighth parole hearing.

Leonard Peltier — A Native American political prisoner serving two consecutive life sentences for a crime he was set up for—the killing of two FBI agents. In the early 70's, Native Americans on the Pine Ridge Reservation were assaulted and murdered by a group of vigilantes and looked towards the American Indian Movement (AIM) for help. Hundreds of AIM members occupied the village of Wounded Knee in Pine Ridge in 1973, demanding an end to the US-backed murder and intimidation of AIM supporters on the reservation and that the treaties signed by the US be honored that gave the Lakota people the right to self-rule the land surrounding the Black Hills. Federal authorities surrounded the occupation with an army of over 300. The Indians refused to back down. They used weapons to defend themselves and held off the government forces for 73 days. After the siege, Leonard came to Pine Ridge with a few other AIM members in 1975 and set up camp in the village of Oglala to protect the village from vigilantes. On July 26, 1975 two FBI agents drove into the property unannounced and unidentified, and a firefight erupted, leaving the two FBI agents and one AIM member dead, while scores of FBI agents and US Marshals surrounded the property. It's believed that the attack against the AIM activists was an attempt to create a diversion for a secret agreement to transfer parts of the Pine Ridge Reservation to the federal government. With fabricated evidence and preventing Leonard from claiming self-defense, Leonard was convicted to two life sentences in federal prison. The struggle for Leonard's freedom is not over. *More information:* whoisleonardpeltier.info

Bill Dunne — Bill is an anti-authoritarian sentenced to 90 years for the attempted liberation of comrades from Seattle's King County Jail in 1979 and for attempting to break himself out of Leavenworth Penitentiary in 1983. Bill was charged with possession of an automatic weapon, auto theft, and aiding & abetting the escape. Charges further alleged the operation was financed by bank expropriations and facilitated by illegal acquisition of weapons and explosives. Bill and his codefendant, Larry Giddings, were accused by police of being members of a small, heavily armed group of revolutionaries," associated with the anarcho-communist Wellspring Communion. Dunne has made the rounds of the federal prison system—including a stint at the infamous Control Unit in Marion, Illinois, where he assisted prisoners with political & academic education. Bill also organizes solidarity runs in conjunction with the Anarchist Black Cross Federation's Running Down the Walls and has edited & written for 4 Struggle magazine. Bill also helped run the newsletter "Prison News Service" from Marion, which was incorporated into the Toronto anarchist prisoner support magazine *Bulldozer*.

SSOC — The Southern Student Organizing Committee (SSOC) was a student activist group in the southern United States during the 1960s, which focused on many political and social issues including: Black liberation, opposition to the Vietnam War, workers' rights, and feminism. It was intended, in part, to be Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) for Southerners and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) for white students – at a time when it was dangerous for SDS to attempt to organize in the Deep South and when SNCC was starting to discuss expelling white volunteers.

Prison Legal News — Prison Legal News (PLN) is a monthly American magazine and online periodical published since May 1990, the longest running newspaper produced by and for current and former prisoners in U.S. history. It was started by revolutionary Ed Mead, a political prisoner imprisoned for his activities with the George Jackson Brigade, and extremely successful jailhouse lawyer. PLN has been involved in litigation concerning First Amendment and censorship issues in the prison and jail context since 1994. Co-editor Ed Mead was prevented from assisting in publishing Prison Legal News due to a condition of his parole prohibiting association with other felons—a policy specifically enacted to prevent him from further involvement with PLN.

Ann Hansen — Ann Hansen stood trial as one of the Squamish Five, members of a radical Canadian anarchist group known as Direct Action who sabotaged government and corporate property in the 1980s. The group carried out militant actions which included an attack on a BC Hydro substation on Vancouver Island and the Litton Industries bombing in Toronto, which was preparing to build components for US cruise missiles—the explosion played a part in Litton losing the contract. Ann was handed a life sentence but was released from Canada's infamous Prison for Women (P4W) after nearly eight years. She spent over thirty years in prison and on parole and has returned to prison twice for parole violations. Now on the outside, Ann tirelessly continues her abolitionist efforts and continues to inspire younger generations. She has published two books, *Direct Action: Memoirs of an Urban Guerrilla* (2002) and *Taking the Rap: Women Doing Time for Society's Crimes* (2018).

Oscar López Rivera — A Puerto Rican revolutionary who was a member and suspected leader of the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional Puertorriqueña

(FALN), a clandestine guerrilla organization devoted to Puerto Rican independence that carried out more than 130 bomb attacks in the United States between 1974 and 1983. Oscar Rivera declared himself a prisoner of war and refused to take part in most of his trial. He maintained that according to international law he was an anticolonial combatant and could not be prosecuted by the United States government. Sentenced to 55 years in federal prison, Oscar was not directly linked to any specific bombings, and released in May 2017, having served 36 years in prison, longer than any other member of the FALN. U.S. President Bill Clinton offered him and 13 other convicted FALN members conditional clemency in 1999, which Oscar rejected the offer on the grounds that not all incarcerated FALN members received pardons. *Oscar López Rivera, Entre la Tortura y la Resistencia,* a collection of his letters was released in 2011.

Tom Manning — A member of the United Freedom Front and the Sam Melville–Jonathan Jackson Unit who spent over twenty years in prison. The group known as the Ohio 7—Ray Luc Levasseur, Patricia Gros Levasseur, Barbara Curzi-Laaman, Carol Saucier Manning, Tom Manning, Jaan Laaman and Richard Williams—were working-class revolutionaries charged with actions against US military facilities, recruitment centers, and corporate headquarters. These actions were done in solidarity with the people of South Africa and Central America, who were bearing the brunt of US imperialism. Tom contributed revolutionary art to *Hauling Up the Morning,* a collection of writings, poetry, and art by political prisoners organized by Ray Luc Levasseur and Tim Blunk. Tom passed away in prison in July 2019.

Marilyn Buck — An anti-imperialist revolutionary who was imprisoned for her participation in the 1979 prison escape of Assata Shakur, the 1981 Brinks robbery, and the 1983 US Senate bombing. Marilyn joined Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) during the height of activism against the Vietnam war while at the University of Texas. In 1967 she moved to Chicago where she edited the SDS newsletter New Left Notes, and incorporated Marxist feminism into the organization's politics. In San Francisco, she worked with Third World Newsreel, a media collective that showcased anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist struggles around the world. Convicted for purchasing ammunition for the Black Liberation Army in 1973, she was sentenced to 10 years in prison, furloughed in 1977, and went underground instead of returning to prison. After her capture and convictions in 1985, she was sentenced to 80 years in federal prison, where she wrote on women in prison, solitary confinement, political prisoner support, and revolutionary poetry. Marilyn passed away on August 3, 2010.

Mutulu Shakur — A Black Liberation Army political prisoner who was sentenced to 60 years in prison for his involvement in the Brinks robbery. Dr. Shakur was active as a teen in the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), a Black Nationalist group that struggled for Black self-determination and socialist change in America. Dr. Shakur also worked very closely with the Black Panther Party, supporting Lumumba and Zayd Shakur. He was a member of the Provisional Government of the Republic of New Afrika, which endorsed the founding of an independent New Afrikan (Black) Republic and the establishment of an independent Black state in the southern U.S. In the 70's Dr. Shakur worked with the Lincoln Detox program, which offered drug rehabilitation for heroin addiction using acupuncture. Dr. Shakur was one of several Black Liberation Army members to carry out the October 1981 Brinks robbery, aided by the May 19 Communist Organization and former members of the Weather Underground. In June 2022, it was revealed that Dr. Shakur had terminal bone marrow cancer with "six months to live." Dr. Shakur passed away from the disease on July 7, 2023, at age 72, about eight months after being paroled.

Black August — An annual commemoration and prison-based holiday to remember Black political prisoners, Black freedom struggles in the United States and beyond, and to highlight Black resistance against racial, colonial and imperialist oppression. It takes place during the entire calendar month of August. Black August was initiated by the Black Guerilla Family in San Quentin State Prison in 1979 when a group of incarcerated people came together to commemorate the deaths of brothers Jonathan P. Jackson (d. August 7, 1970) and George Jackson (d. August 21, 1971) at San Quentin State Prison. Observers of Black August commit to higher levels of discipline throughout the month. This can include fasting from food and drink, frequent physical exercise and political study, and engagement in political struggle.

Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael) — A Black revolutionary who played a major role in the Black liberation movement in the United States and the global pan-African movement. He was a key leader in the development of the Black Power movement, first while leading the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), then as the "Honorary Prime Minister" of the Black Panther Party, and last as a leader of the All-African People's Revolutionary Party (A-APRP). Kwame was one of the original SNCC freedom riders of 1961, and a major voting rights activist in Mississippi and Alabama after being mentored by Ella Baker and Bob Moses, but became disillusioned with the two-party system after the 1964 Democratic National Convention failed to recognize the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. SNCC conducted its first actions against the military draft and the Vietnam War under Kwame's leadership. He popularized the oft-repeated anti-draft slogan "Hell no, we won't go!" during this time. Kwame privately took credit for pushing Martin Luther King toward anti-imperialism. During this period, he traveled and lectured extensively throughout the world, visiting Guinea, North Vietnam, China, and Cuba. He became more clearly identified with the Black Panther Party as its "Honorary Prime Minister." Kwame remained in Guinea after his separation from the Black Panther Party. He continued to travel, write, and speak in support of international leftist movements. In 1971 he published his collected essays in a second book, *Stokely Speaks: Black Power Back to Pan-Africanism.* This book expounds an explicitly

socialist Pan-African vision, which he retained for the rest of his life. For the final 30 years of his life, Kwame was devoted to the All-African People's Revolutionary Party (A-APRP). His mentor Kwame Nkrumah had many ideas for unifying the African continent, and Kwame extended the scope of these ideas to the entire African diaspora. He was a Central Committee member during his association with the A-APRP and made many speeches on the party's behalf. Kwame passed away in Guinea in 1998.

Jamil Al-Amin — Formerly known as H. Rap Brown, the Imam came to prominence in the 1960s as chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Justice Minister of the Black Panther Party. He is perhaps most famous for his proclamation during that period that "violence is as American as cherry pie," as well as once stating that "If America don't come around, we're gonna burn it down." In 1968, Jamil went underground after facing weapons and incitement to riot charges following a rally that occurred in Cambridge, Maryland which left Jamil with a shotgun wound to the head. After 18 months in hiding and on the FBI's Most Wanted list, Jamil resurfaced in an attack of a New York City bar which was targeted for its exploitation of the community. This action resulted in a shootout with police that left Jamil and two cops with injuries. Jamil subsequently spent 5 years in prison for charges related to the incident. Upon his release, Jamil opened a grocery store in Atlanta, which he maintained until 2000 when he was arrested for the murder of a Fulton County cop. Later that year, another man confessed to the shooting. In 2002 Jamil, was convicted and sentenced to life without parole. *More information:* whathappened2rap.com

Malcolm X — A Black revolutionary and Nation of Islam spokesman. During the Civil Rights Movement, Malcolm X advocated for freedom "by any means necessary." After leaving the Nation of Islam, Malcolm traveled to Africa and West Asia, meeting with revolutionary Pan-African socialist leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah, Ben Bella, Gamal Abdel Nasser, and others. Before his assassination, Malcolm converted to Sunni Islam, and after completing the Hajj to Mecca he became known as "el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz." Malcolm connected with the communist Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) and advocated revolutionary Black internationalism, before he was assassinated on February 21, 1965.

Frantz Fanon — A revolutionary political philosopher, and Marxist from the French colony of Martinique. His works have become influential in the fields of post-colonial studies, critical theory, and Marxism. As well as being an intellectual, Fanon was a political radical, Pan-Africanist, and Marxist concerned with the psychopathology of colonization and the human, social, and cultural consequences of decolonization. In the course of his work as a physician and psychiatrist, Fanon supported the Algerian War of independence from France and was a member of the Algerian National Liberation Front. With his health declining, Fanon's comrades urged him to seek treatment in the US as his Soviet doctors had suggested. The CIA likely had a role in his death of pneumonia. His works *Black Skin, White Masks*, *A Dying Colonialism*, and *The Wretched of the Earth* are still read to this day by revolutionaries around the world.

Nat Turner — Led the Southampton Insurrection, a slave rebellion in Virginia, in A ugust 1831. Nat Turner was enslaved in Southampton County, Virginia in the early 19th century. He thought that revolutionary violence was necessary for liberation. On an annular solar eclipse on February 12, 1831, Nat Turner envisioned this as a Black man's hand reaching over the sun and started the rebellion a week later, on August 21. The rebellion expanded from several trusted slaves to over 70 enslaved and free Blacks, some of whom were on horseback, armed with knives, hatchets, and blunt instruments. The state militia suppressed the rebellion at Belmont Plantation on the morning of August 23. The rebels killed between 55 and 65 White people before being defeated by the militia, making it the deadliest slave revolt in U.S. history. The militia had twice the manpower of the rebels and three companies of artillery. Nat Turner was not captured and survived in hiding for more than 30 days afterward. To this day Nat Turner is recognized as a resistance hero for avenging the suffering of Africans and African Americans.

John Brown — A prominent leader in the American abolitionist movement in the decades preceding the Civil War. First reaching national prominence in the 1850s for his radical abolitionism and fighting in Bleeding Kansas, Brown was captured, tried, and executed by the Commonwealth of Virginia for a raid and incitement of a slave rebellion at Harpers Ferry in 1859. John Brown first gained national attention when he led anti-slavery volunteers and his sons during the Bleeding Kansas crisis of the late 1850s, a state-level civil war over whether Kansas would enter the Union as a slave state or a free state. He was dissatisfied with abolitionist pacifism, saying of pacifists, "These men are all talk. What we need is action—action!" In May 1856, John Brown and his sons killed five supporters of slavery in the Pottawatomie massacre, and then commanded anti-slavery forces at the Battle of Black Jack and the Battle of Osawatomie. In October 1859, Brown led a raid on the federal armory at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, intending to start a slave liberation movement that would spread south. He seized the armory, but seven people were killed and ten or more were injured. John Brown was captured, tried and charged with treason, and executed, being the first person executed for treason against in the US. John Brown was inspired by the Haitian revolution, slave rebellions in the Carribean, and maroon colonies of escaped slaves during the Seminole Wars.

Eldridge Cleaver — An early leader of the Black Panther Party, having the titles in the Party as Minister of Information and Head of the International Section of the Panthers, while a fugitive in Cuba and Algeria. After releasing from prison in 1966, Eldridge joined the Oakland-based BPP, serving as Minister of

Information, or spokesperson. After Martin Luther King was assassinated, Eldridge and 14 other Panthers were involved in a confrontation with Oakland police. Cleaver was wounded during the ambush and 17-year-old Black Panthers member Bobby Hutton was killed. Charged with attempted murder after the incident, Eldridge jumped bail to flee to Cuba in late 1968. Eldridge then went with his wife Kathleen Cleaver to Algeria, where they helped to set up a local headquarters that would soon welcome Donald Cox, Sekou Odinga, and Larry Mack, as the Black Panther Party would embrace international revolutionary struggles, Black and Arab alike. Multiple American radicals hijacked planes to Algeria for safety with the BPP office. After a split with Huey P Newton over the role of armed struggle in the BPP, Cleaver would eventually be expelled from the BPP.

Che Guevara — An Argentine Marxist revolutionary, physician, author, guerrilla leader, diplomat, military theorist, and leader in the Cuban revolution. Che interspersed his college training in medicine with motorcycle travels around South America, including Guatemala during the 1954 CIA-sponsored coup, where his close contact with exploitation would solidify his communist beliefs in armed struggle and revolution. Che met Raúl and Fidel Castro while exiled in Mexico City, joined their 26th of July Movement, and sailed to Cuba aboard the yacht Granma with the intention of overthrowing US-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista. Che became an integral part of the rebel army and was appointed to second in command during the guerrilla war of liberation to defeat the US-supported Batista regime. After the revolution, Che was involved with revolutionary tribunals, instituting agrarian land reform as minister of industries, helping spearhead a successful nationwide literacy campaign, serving as both president of the National Bank and instructional director for Cuba's armed forces, and traversing the globe as a diplomat on behalf of Cuban socialism. He composed a seminal guerrilla warfare manual, numerous diaries, and theories of imperialism and colonialism. Che left Cuba in 1965 to foment continental revolutions across both Africa and South America, first in the Congo and later in Bolivia, where he was captured by CIA-assisted Bolivian forces and summarily executed.

Angela Davis — An American Marxist and feminist political activist, philosopher, academic, and author. A longtime member of the Communist Party USA (CPUSA), she was also affiliated with the Los Angeles chapter of the Black Panther Party, while a philosophy professor at UCLA. A leader in the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee, after Jonathan Jackson attempted to liberate the Soledad Brothers through an attack on the Marin County Civic Center in 1970, an arrest warrant for Angela was issued after it came to light that she had bought sevaral of the guns Jonathan used in the attack. She was captured by the FBI and released on bail after a 16 month international "Free Angela" campaign. Angela was acquitted of the charges in June 1972. Angela was twice the Communist Party's candidate for vice president. In 1997, she co-founded Critical Resistance, an organization working to abolish the prison–industrial complex. Angela's books and theories are a foundation in the prison abolition movement.

fedayeen — The Arabic word that usually connotes Palestinian guerrilla fighters.

Stop Cop City — A decentralized movement in Atlanta, Georgia, whose goal is to stop construction of the Atlanta Public Safety Training Center (known as Cop City) by the Atlanta Police Foundation and the City of Atlanta. The proposed location for the facility is the Old Atlanta Prison Farm. The movement has involved forest defense tactics like tree-sits, encampments, industrial sabotage, as well as broader tactics like acting against contractors involved, mass demonstrations, petitions, etc. Georgia State Troopers and other agencies launched a raid against forest defenders on January 18, 2023 and assassinated a young forest-defender named Tortugita (Manuel Terán). After a protest on March 5, 2023 during a week of action convergence, construction and police equipment were destroyed, and police launched a raid on a nearby music festival arresting dozens of people. At least 61 Defend the Atlanta Forest / Stop Cop City protestors have been charged with domestic terrorism under RICO charges, including an Atlanta bail fund.

Nelson Mandela — A South African anti-apartheid revolutionary and political prisoner who served as the first president of South Africa from 1994 to 1999. Committed to the overthrow of the settler-colonial apartheid state, he was repeatedly arrested for seditious activities with the African National Congress (ANC) party. Influenced by Marxism, he secretly joined the banned South African Communist Party (SACP). Although initially committed to non-violent protest, in association with the SACP he co-founded the ANC guerrilla organization uMkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation) in 1961 that led a sabotage campaign against the apartheid government. He was arrested and imprisoned in 1962, and, following the Rivonia Trial, was sentenced to life imprisonment for conspiring to overthrow the state. Amid growing domestic and international pressure, he was released in 1990. Mandela led the effort to negotiate an end to apartheid, and served as the first president of South Africa.

Merrimack 4 — In November 2023, The "Merrimack Four," were involved in a Palestine Action US protest in New Hampshire that halted operations at Elbit Systems, Israel's largest weapons supplier which provides eighty-five percent of its military drone fleet used against Palestinians in Gaza. They were initially hit with a slew of felony charges—conspiracy, criminal mischief, burglary, and more—that threatened a maximum of thirty-seven years in prison. They are serving a 30 day sentence in jail from November to December 2024.

Green Scare — For years, the FBI targeted ecological activists as their #1 priority This is one of the chief reasons environmental devastation has continued unchecked. At the end of 2005, the FBI opened a new phase of its assault on

earth and animal liberation movements—known as the Green Scare—with the arrests and indictments of a large number of activists. This offensive, which they dubbed Operation Backfire, was intended to obtain convictions for many of the unsolved Earth Liberation Front arsons of the preceding ten years—but more so, to have a debilitating effect on all ecological direct action. Unfortunately many of those charged cooperated with the state and snitched on their fellow co-defendants.

Marius Mason — a transgender environmental and animal rights activist and anarchist. In 1999, in the name of the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) he set fire to a lab at the University of Michigan that was conducting research on genetically modified organisms (GMO). After Marius' husband turned state's-evidence, Marius was threatened with a life sentence for the arson and other acts of sabotage. With little financial stability and fear of dragging his family into a costly legal battle, Marius pled guilty and was given an extreme sentence of nearly 22 years. No one was ever harmed in any of his actions. *More information:* supportmariusmason.org

Eric McDavid — an American green anarchist who was arrested along two others in 2006, as part of the Green Scare. All three were charged with "Conspiracy to damage and destroy property by fire and an explosive." The conspiracy charge is, quite literally, a thought-crime. No actions were ever carried out by Eric or any of his alleged co-conspirators. Eric's arrest was the direct result of an FBI informant known only as "Anna," who was paid over $65,000 for her work with the FBI, spent a year and a half drawing him in, fabricating a crime, and implicating Eric in it. In 2015, Eric released from prison after the FBI admitted it had withheld approximately 2,500 pages of documents potentially useful for his defense.

Jake Conroy — one of the Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) 7 defendants, who were arrested for allegedly spearheading the campaign to force the closure of Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS), an animal-testing company based in the UK and US. SHAC was one of the most successful grassroots animal rights campaigns in history. The SHAC 7 were the first to be charged under the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act. During the trial, the defendants were prohibited from providing evidence of animal cruelty taking place at Huntingdon Life Sciences testing laboratories. Jake was sentenced to 48 months in federal prison, and is currently working at an international environmental non-profit campaigning against corporate polluters.

People's Senate / Spirit of Mandela — The Spirit of Mandela (SoM) is a coalition founded in 2018, led by Black Liberation organizers and former political prisoners working with Black, Brown, and Indigenous Peoples and their allies to bring international attention to US human rights violations amounting to genocide. Through its endeavors, the SoM Coalition successfully initiated the 2021 International Tribunal charging the United States government with five counts of violations based on international law, and an independent Panel of Jurists found the US guilty of genocide on all five counts. Subsequently, SoM has launched one of the most comprehensive national action campaigns/initiatives in decades—the Peoples' Senate—seeking to unify progressive and radical activists across geographic, ideological, and other divides. *More information*: spiritofmandela.org/

Write to Political Prisoners mentioned in this conversation

for a monthly updated list of political prisoners & their addresses visit

nycabc.wordpress.com

Rattling the Cages

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3) Antifascism Behind Bars
Eric King and David Campbell

4) Black August & Prisoner Support
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5) Eric King in Conversation with James Kilgore
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7) Until All Are Free
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8) Revolutionary Women Behind Bars
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Eric King, Josh Davidson, Hector Rodriguez, Farhan Ahmed

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Eric King, Sara Falconer, Josh Davidson

11) Abolition Is a Family Affair
Eric King, Sharon Shoatz, susie day, Rochell Bricker

12) Looking Back at the George Jackson Brigade
Mark Cook, Janine Bertram, Eric King

all conversations are available @FirestormCoop on youtube

As you've heard & read, it is vital that we support the political prisoners of our liberation movements. Providing support builds bridges across and through prison bars, giving those locked inside a connection to the outside world. Your support matters.

Get involved. Write to a political prisoner—a simple letter provides a needed escape. Visit them in prison. Ask what a political prisoner needs and do what you can to help them. Offer them support.

Visit the NYC Anarchist Black Cross website (*nycabc.wordpress.com*) and learn more about those currently imprisoned for political reasons.

Support Political Prisoners

Buy a *Certain Days: Freedom for Political Prisoners* calendar (*certaindays.org*).

Visit your local Books Through Bars group and send books to those incarcerated (*booksthroughbarsnyc.org/resources*).

Join your nearest Anarchist Black Cross group (*abcf.net*).

Visit *rattlingthecages.com* to learn more.